

1.94
Ad 45 Ne

United States Department of Agriculture
AGRICULTURAL ADJUSTMENT ADMINISTRATION
Washington, D. C.

NEW IRRIGATED LANDS: HOPE OR MENACE? *

There is a belief among some farmers that the Federal Government is bringing many millions of acres of uncultivated lands into production through irrigation. "Then why," they ask, "should we curtail our acreages of wheat, corn, cotton, and other soil-depleting crops of which excess quantities are being produced, when increased plantings of such crops may be taking place on the irrigated areas?"

What are the facts?

In 1938, after the Federal Government had been building reclamation projects for 36 years, the land in crops receiving water from Federal enterprises totaled about 3,030,000 acres, or less than 1 percent of that year's harvested crop acreage. Included in this figure are 1,254,800 acres already irrigated by private projects which merely purchased additional water from Federal storage reservoirs under provisions of the Warren Act. This leaves only about 1,775,000 acres which were actually a part of Federal projects. A total of approximately 17,000,000 acres of other cropland, however, was irrigated in 1938 by private, cooperative, city, or State irrigation enterprises.

The acres now irrigated by Federal projects support directly 873,500 persons living on farms and in towns adjacent to the projects.

* Prepared by Division of Information in response to many requests for facts on this subject, July 1938. Revised December 1939.

Most of the food and feed crops produced on these acres are, therefore, needed for local consumption.

Irrigated Acreage Largely Devoted to Feed Crops

Hay and forage crops are the crops most extensively grown on the irrigated lands. In each of the years 1936 and 1937, approximately 50 percent of the acreage cropped on the Federal reclamation projects was devoted to these crops, chiefly alfalfa. Approximately 10 percent of the acreage was in wheat, about 11 percent in cotton, 4 percent in corn, and approximately 3.6 percent in sugar beets. The remaining 20 percent was in barley, oats, vegetables, fruits, and other crops. In 1938, the value of crops harvested from Federally irrigated acres totaled \$67,859,804. This is less than 1½ percent of the Nation's total farm value of principal crops which in that year totaled nearly \$5,000,000,000.

To Add 1,000,000 Acres By 1948

As regards the future, the Bureau of Reclamation recently released data showing that about 1,000,000 acres of additional lands are expected to be brought under irrigation by 1948 by Federal reclamation projects now under construction, or which have been under construction during the past four years.

About 12,600 of these additional acres are to be brought under irrigation in 1939; 32,500 in 1940; 30,000 in 1941; and 71,000 in 1942. In 1943, when the Grand Coulee Dam-Columbia Basin project is expected to be able to furnish water for 150,000 acres of land, the total additional acres brought in will be 230,000. Thereafter, until 1948, the additional acres, including Grand Coulee units, will run as follows: 1944 - 141,000:

- 3 -

1945 - 128,000; 1946 - 100,000; 1947 - 90,000; 1948 - 85,000. After 1948, the Grand Coulee will continue to bring under irrigation 50,000 acres annually until the project is completed, probably in 1964.

Reclamation Projects Have Several Purposes

Irrigation is just one phase of the Federal Land Reclamation Program. Most of the projects are "multiple-purpose" enterprises and are often referred to as "rescue projects." The Grand Coulee Dam, for instance, is being built for hydro-electric power and to improve navigation as well as to irrigate lands. The Central Valley project in California, now under construction, is intended not only to alleviate critical water shortages in important agricultural areas, but also to prevent salt water intrusion into delta lands and to supplement the generation of water-power at Shasta Dam when completed.

Construction of the main canal on the All-American canal, California (Boulder Canyon Project), which was authorized December 21, 1928 and is now virtually completed, and of the Coachella Branch canal, which is under construction, will provide water for the irrigation of 521,600 acres of the Imperial Valley and 152,930 acres in the Coachella Valley. The Imperial Valley lands are now and have been since 1901 irrigated by the Imperial Canal, a private enterprise. About 16,000 acres in the Coachella Valley are now irrigated by pumping from wells, leaving approximately 137,000 acres of additional lands to come in. According to the Bureau of Reclamation, the canal to the Coachella Valley is expected to be completed in 1942, but construction of a lateral distribution system has not yet been authorized, and it will probably be several years after

the completion of the canal before the entire Coachella Valley area is under irrigation.

Many Thousands of Homeless Farmers Need Farms

Commissioner of Reclamation, John C. Page, has estimated that while Federal reclamation projects, when completed, will furnish more than 31,000 farmsteads, this number will not be sufficient to take care of more than a part of the homeless families now in the West.

New opportunities on family-sized farms are needed today for the thousands of families driven from their homes in the Great Plains by the droughts of 1934 and 1936. Since the drought years, according to the Farm Security Administration, more than 200,000 families have migrated, mostly into far western states, from drought-stricken areas. Almost all of the drought immigrants could once again become self-supporting under favorable farming opportunities and with adequate assistance.

Marginal Land Being Retired

Under provisions of the Bankhead-Jones Act, the Secretary of Agriculture has authorized the purchase of approximately 4,432,000 acres of marginal land or land not primarily suited to cultivation. As of June 15, 1939, options had been accepted on 1,544,412 acres under this authorization. A considerable portion of the land already under option is located in the Great Plains area and will be utilized in effecting long-term programs of agricultural rehabilitation. Likewise, under the Resettlement Administration programs more than 9,000,000 acres, about 1,000,000 of which were in crops, were purchased and diverted to other uses such as grazing, forestry, recreation, and wildlife conservation.